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CADENCE IN ENGLISH PROSE

In his suggestive pamphlet upon prose rhythm in English,¹ published in 1913, Mr. Albert Clark applied the four cursus forms of mediaeval Latin, and their two variants, to English prose. His purpose was to show the presence of Latin cadences in English prose style. Having successfully demonstrated these, he stopped without making any attempt to consider the non-classical cadences. In this paper I purpose to make a beginning on the classification of these non-classical cadences, and, putting the classical and non-classical together, to make a tentative system of cadences in English prose rhythm.

Where are cadences to be found? This is a question which can be asked with great propriety, for it has not as yet been definitely settled. The most obvious place to find a cadence is at the close of a sentence; for there the reader pauses for an instant and the voice falls. A short sentence without any pauses in it would therefore have only one cadence. But when longer sentences are considered the fixing of cadences is somewhat more difficult. A sentence which is divided into two co-ordinate clauses will have two cadences, one at the end of each clause. This process of subdivision can be carried still further, for the clauses may be divided again and again within themselves, if they are long enough to require it. Each section of a sentence which ends with a pause and therefore a cadence, is called a *clausula*. The following sentence from Bacon will show simplicity in *clausulae* division:

“Read not to contradict and confute, / nor to believe and take for granted,
/ not to talk and find discourse, / but to weigh and consider. /”

These *clausulae*, or sentence divisions, are clearly defined and the pauses at the points indicated by (/) are obvious. The divisions naturally occur at the places of punctuation, which is very generally the case in English prose style. Let me give another example of comparatively simple and clear *clausulae* division. The following sentences are from Burke's essay, *On the Sublime and Beautiful*.

¹ Albert C. Clark—*Prose Rhythm in English*. Oxford: 1913.

"To make everything very terrible, / obscurity seems in general to be necessary. / When we know the full extent of any danger, / when we can accustom our eyes to it, / a great deal of apprehension vanishes. / Every one will be sensible of this, / who considers how greatly night adds to our dread, in all cases of danger, / and how much notions of ghosts and goblins, / of which none can form clear ideas, / affect minds which give credit to the popular tales concerning such sorts of beings. /"

Cadences, however, do not always occur at every point of punctuation; they may occur between points of punctuation and after a series of short phrases, such as a series of nouns. In this last case there would be only one cadence and that at the close of the enumeration of nouns. At times even punctuation cannot be trusted, particularly in writing of a period earlier than the nineteenth century. To place a cadence after every point of punctuation in the following quotation from Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas*, would, indeed, be unreasonable.

"Ye, who listen, with credulity, to the whispers of fancy, / and pursue, with eagerness the phantoms of hope; / who expect, that age will perform the promises of youth, / and that the deficiencies of the present day will be supplied by the morrow; / attend to the history of *Rasselas*, prince of Abissinia. /"

This division of sentences into clausulae with cadences at their close along lines of punctuation is simple enough; for the reader naturally pauses at those places. But at times the reader will meet sections of sentences or even whole sentences which have no punctuation and which, nevertheless, he cannot pronounce, (by reason of their length,) without pausing to renew his breath. Such pauses of their own accord produce cadences and must be reckoned with in a consideration of the cadences of a passage. The moot point is, where shall the reader pause to get his breath. This frequently depends upon the way the reader feels the sentence can be broken without destroying the sense. At times there is a more or less natural opportunity to pause after the subject and its modifiers have been passed and the reading of the verb and its group of modifiers has not yet begun. This sentence from Macaulay is an admirable illustration of the point in question.

"That these suspicions were not without foundation / is proved by the dying speeches of some penitent robbers of that age, / who appeared to have received from the inn-keepers / services much resembling those which Farquhar's Boniface rendered to Gibbet. /"

I have placed the end of the first clausula after "foundation" because it is the dividing point between the subject and the predi-

cate and the easiest place to stop. In the second case I have placed the end of the clausula after "inn-keepers" because the extreme length of the clause necessitates a break and the weakest place in the clause is there.

The last reason for a cadence is the pausing by the reader in the midst of a clause or sentence for rhetorical effect. Concerning the position of these cadences nothing definite can be said; for they depend wholly upon the reader's interpretation of the sentence. The possibility, however, of their presence must be noted.

The next problem which arises after that of determining the position, is that of the composition of the cadence itself. In constructing the definition of a cadence I have aimed to make it follow exactly the characteristics of the cursus as used in English. A cadence consists of a stress group with two primary stresses with or without a varying arrangement of secondary stresses and non-stressed syllables. The first syllable of the cadence must be one of primary stress and the last syllable of the cadence must coincide with the last syllable of the clausula. There are no restrictions as to the length of the cadence; but I have found none over nine syllables long. The construction of a cadence will probably be understood most easily by examples.

"With his gaily decorated weapons, / Südermann will fight, / not against flesh and blood alone, / but against spiritual adversaries, / such as doubt and fear. /"

The pause at "weapons" produces a cadence; the stress on "de" is the second primary stress from the end of the clausula and hence is the beginning of the cadence. The cadence covers all the syllables from "de" to the end of the clausula. The last cadence is almost the simplest one possible; for it has only one unstressed syllable in it. The rule is, Find where the clausula ends, count back to the second primary stress from the end, and you have the kind and extent of the cadence there.

As the above sentence illustrates, there are a number of different cadences in English. My purpose has been to collect as many of them as I could and arrange them in a table. I began with the six forms (1-4) which Mr. Clark has demonstrated are present in English prose style. I have left the numbering of those six forms as he gave it in order that the so-called classical

element might the more easily be recognized. The collection of these forms has resulted in the following table:

Classical forms. (Mr. Clark)		
1	voces testantur	servants departed
1 ²	esse videare	canopy of heaven
2	mea curatio	perfect felicity
2 ²	missae celebratio	summits and declivities
3	gaudia pervenire	glorious undertaking
4	spiritum pertimescere	bountiful liberality
Non-classical forms		
5	--	roe-deer
6	---	heart trembles
7	----	over all
8	-----	low estimate
9	-----	rich with roses
10	-----	heavenly host
11	-----	fighting images
12	-----	monument to man
13	-----	ample cemetery
14	-----	infirmities of a man
15	-----	visible conservatories
16	-----	proprietarys of these bones
17	-----	antique literature
18	-----	department of literature
19	-----	vehemently gesticulating
20	-----	negation of conceivability
21	-----	well as spirituality
22	-----	diuturnity unto his relicks
23	-----	poetic imaginativeness

The method of establishing this table of endings has been purely exploratory. The aim has been to investigate a number of authors, nearly all of the nineteenth century, and to tabulate the forms found there. The writings examined cover sections from novels, literary essays, works on philosophy, economics, history, biography, religion, and science. The more representative men of the century, such as are found in Craik's *English Prose*, were taken as the basis of this investigation. The total number of cadences examined was about five thousand. I stopped because the last two thousand five hundred cadences which I examined, produced no new forms, although the literature was just as much varied as that which I had examined before. This does not prove that the table is complete; it merely gives it a reasonable basis upon which to rest, and shows that any other forms which may be found upon further investigation are very uncommon.

A few illustrations will probably help in the understanding of the use of these endings. The first illustration is the same as that used before in this paper from Samuel Johnson. The number which follows the cadence is the number of the form on the preceding table.

"Ye, who listen, with credulity, to the whis̄pers of fā̄ncy, (1) and pursue, with eagerness the phā̄ntoms of hō̄pe; (10) who expect, that age will perform the prō̄mises of yō̄uth, (12) and that the deficiencies of the present day will be suppl̄ied by the mō̄rrow; (1) attend to the history of Rasselas, prī̄nce of Abissī̄nia. (2³)"

Take the opening paragraph of the fifth chapter of *Urn Burial*, that magnificent symphony of rhythm, and note the variety of the cadences.

"Now since these dead bones have already outlasted the living ones of Methuselah, (2) and in a yard under ground, and thin walls of clay, (7) outworn all the strong and specious buildings above it; (1) and quietly rested under the drums and trappings of three conquests: (6) what prince can promise such diuturnity unto his relicks, (22) or might gladly say, (7)

Sic ego componi versus in ossa velim?

Time, which antiquates antiquities, (11) and hath an art to make dust of all things, (10) hath yet spared these minor monuments. (11)"

A few sentences from Macaulay will give additional illustration of the method of applying these cadences to the masters of English prose. The following is a short selection from the third chapter of his *History of England*.

"Whatever might be the way in which a journey was performed, (12) the travellers, unless they were numerous and well armed, (14) ran considerable risk of being stopped and plundered. (9) The mounted highwayman, known to our generation only from books, (10) was to be found on every main road. (5) The waste tracts which lay on the great routes near London (9) were especially haunted by plunderers of this class. (14)"

Thus we have twenty-five cadences which are found in modern literature. The question still remains as to which of them are more rhythmical and which are less. Concerning this we have a little to offer now but must wait for further investigations for more definite conclusions. On the basis of usage alone certain of these cadences seem to be of little importance. The following

table gives the list of the cadences with the percentage of usage in about five thousand occurrences.

No.	Form	Percentage
7	— — —	.1724
9	— — — —	.116
10	— — — —	.109
5	— —	.1085
1	— — — —	.0973
6	— — —	.064
1 ²	— — — — —	.0559
12	— — — — —	.535
11	— — — — —	.0513
2	— — — — —	.0443
3	— — — — —	.0265
2 ²	— — — — —	.0239
8	— — — —	.0206
14	— — — — —	.0127
4	— — — — —	.0111
22	— — — — —	.00526
18	— — — — —	.0046
13	— — — — —	.0037
15	— — — — —	.0035
17	— — — — —	.00329
16	— — — — —	.00307
19	— — — — —	.000109
21	— — — — —	.00006
20	— — — — —	.00002
23	— — — — —	.00002

This table gives only the relative importance of the cadence; for it is not based upon a sufficient number of cadences to make it absolute. In some respects, however, it is absolute. No amount of future investigation is likely to bring the last few cadences up to the head of the list. The forms which are at the top of the table reached those positions soon after the tabulating of the forms commenced and they have not changed. This of course does not prove that the first cadences are more rhythmical and the others less so. The internal content of the cadences, especially in regard to their meaning, and their relation to the prevailing and preceding rhythm of the clausula in which they are situated, have a great effect upon their rhythm value. This cannot be determined by any detached study of the cadences themselves. I might say, however, that if the prevailing rhythm of English style, according to Saintsbury, seems to be trochaic, the best cadences

theoretically ought to be those which naturally complete a trochaic clausula. But as to which these are I am not prepared to say at this time.

For the present, then, we have been forced to be satisfied with an attempt to gather together all the cadences, and find out their relative relation, numerically, to each other. The determinations as to which of them are more rhythmical must come later when we have developed more certain methods of measuring the rhythm of a cadence.

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